RATIONALE FOR PRESERVING AGRICULTURAL LAND IN MARYLAND

Agricultural Land Use -- The Central Issue

Agricultural land is a many splendored thing. To some, it is soil -- how many bushels of corn will it raise? To others, it is a small piece of the earth's surface, rare as a gem, something to be cherished and enjoyed like an old masterpiece. To still others, it is space -- something on which to build a home, an apartment, a shopping center.

Agricultural land provides amenities such as fresh air, quiet, and a change from the monotony of city scapes. It provides room for service facilities such as parks and recreational areas. It also provides the regional physical conditions for watershed protection, soil conservation, flood prevention, and protection of wildlife and other natural resources, including preservation of the best lands for crops and forests in economically significant acreage.

Agricultural land can be used to separate neighborhoods, communities, towns or cities, metropolitan areas and regions, and is a means of controlling urban sprawl.

Just two decades ago, rural open spaces were within easy access of most people -- even those in large metropolitan areas. Today, when one gets to the countryside, he may not find true open space. Strings of subdivision-type houses clutter many villages, frequently with no apparent break between them. The problem, then, of open space in rural areas is one of preservation. String developments destroy open countryside. Means are needed to preserve some lands for cropland, pastureland, forestland, or other agricultural use.

Imaginative, balanced, planned development will work as well for small rural villages as it will for large metropolitan regions. Planning for reasonably compact development and for preservation of agricultural land is a challenge for each of us.

Public Benefits of an Agricultural Land Use Policy

The major objective of the proposed land policy included in this report is to promote the beneficial and efficient use of Maryland agricultural land and associated resources and to improve the quality of life for citizens of the State.

As a source of essential food and fiber and evironmental open space, agriculture exists for the public benefit and, as an

industry, in turn, is affected by the public interest. The wise use of prime farmland in Maryland is of paramount importance, and a comprehensive land use policy should be adopted which will guarantee the attainment of the benefits listed below.

1. To provide fresh, high quality food at reasonable cost at locations close to the consumer.

   The record shows that the men and women of Maryland's farms, by applying the latest advances of science and technology, have increased yields of crops and livestock. This makes it possible for fewer persons to produce more fresh, high quality food at attractive prices (sixteen percent disposable income) for urban consumers in the Mid-Atlantic Region. Maryland's record of farm efficiency parallels that of the U.S., wherein productivity of agriculture in the last twenty years has increased three-hundred percent -- double that of the non-farm sector of our economy.

2. To contribute to a stable economy in Maryland by providing job opportunities, income, a market for the resources of production.

   The Maryland agricultural complex currently comprises 32,315 business enterprises. They employ 188,000 people or about fourteen percent of the State's total employment. They represent a total combined investment of $6 billion, and they generate, by economic activity (combining all phases from production through retail), about $2.85 billion, or approximately 14.2 percent of the Gross State Product. In the years ahead, agriculture's contribution to the Gross State Product is expected to increase substantially.

3. To contribute to the nation's balance of payments by providing food and fiber for export.

   One of the major changes in the agricultural world is the dramatic climb in U.S. farm exports -- from $5.7 billion in 1969 to over $11 billion in the fiscal year ending this June 30. That $11 billion is roughly equal to the total value of all our exports of industrial machinery last year -- and it's more than four times the total exports of all U.S. consumer goods. For example, there is a growth in world demand for the production of soybeans, and Maryland continues to increase production of this crop.

4. To provide reserve food production capacity to meet the future needs of our population.

   Cropland acreage has been decreasing since 1950; however, during this same period, production per acre has increased about three percent per year, due to such things as fertilizers, pesticides, better technology, including soil and water

conservation practices, and less use of lower grade land. Efficient agriculture, made possible by scientific research and the American farmer's ingenuity, deserves the interest and support of every citizen. As we look to the future, we must remember that our land and water space is finite. As demand for land and water resources grows, the price we pay for limited use or nonuse will be greater. Once converted to developmental areas, the land is lost forever for future agricultural production.

5. To provide wood products from farm wood lots.

   Maryland's annual output of roundwood, saw timber, pulpwood, poles and piling, together with other wood products, has a value range of between $14 million and $16 million, of which about $10 million is saw timber. These sales are expected to increase to approximately $30 million in 1986. The projected increase is based on an anticipated strong demand for wood products which should encourage improvement in forest management. Although total growth now exceeds total cut by nearly one hundred million board feet, the current growth of softwood timber is hardly two-thirds of the cut. A massive effort of softwood reforestation will be required to prevent serious depletion, and the preservation of agricultural land will provide the necessary area for this reforestation program.

6. To maintain the quality and beauty of the environment through the cleansing effect of growing plants on the supply of oxygen and the filtering effects of plants and soil on water supply.

   Cultivated and non-cultivated areas, such as pastures and wood lots, are all essential for, and contribute to, the maintaining of clean air and water. While oxygen is removed from the air by some non-biological processes and added by a few, photosynthesis -- the action of sunlight on green plants -- is the only process that adds any substantial quality to the air. Well managed land is maintained in the condition that absorbs the maximum amount of rainfall. This contributes to the water table and tends to maintain a natural flow of springs, streams, and rivers and reduces sedimentation.

7. To maintain farm associated wildlife habitats and provide for private outdoor recreational areas -- camping, fishing, hunting, hiking, etc.

   Most farmland can provide some kinds of recreational opportunities. Hunting and fishing are probably the most important. Farms contain hundreds of ponds and include thousands of miles of streams that produce fish and provide nesting areas for wildlife. Farmlands also provide opportunities for hiking, picnicking, and camping. Where adequate facilities exist or

can be provided, vacation farms provide an opportunity for city families to enjoy modest-cost, unsophisticated vacations outdoors, together with an opportunity to see something of farm life.

8. To provide areas for recycling of solid and liquid waste.

   An alternative for disposing of treated sewage effluents into waterways is to apply these effluents to agricultural land as supplemental irrigation. Preservation of agricultural land is necessary to make this alternative feasible.

9. To protect mineral resources from being preempted.

   Once land is placed under asphalt or concrete, it is virtually impossible to reclaim it for extraction of mineral resources. The operation and processing of minerals is a necessary part of our life, and open spaces must be provided, with appropriate safeguards, so that it can be accomplished.

10. To provide productive, taxpaying, privately maintained agricultural open space with its environmental benefits, including rural aesthetics and enhanced air and water quality.

    Privately owned and operated farms can provide productive, taxpaying, open space buffers between our towns and cities, allowing them to maintain their autonomy. They provide an aesthetic relief from concrete and mortar within urban centers and can serve as environmental protective buffer areas around selected industrial sites, arterial highways, or commercial centers.

11. To preserve a way of life.

    Farmers today cherish traditional rural values. The cardinal points of the agrarian tradition -- independence, the belief that agriculture is man's fundamental employment upon which other economic activities depend, and the conviction that farming is a natural life and therefore a good life -- are held by many farm people and, as a recent study shows, by many city dwellers as well. Farmers stress freedom of action; freedom from the crime, noise, and traffic of cities; a healthier environment, and the farm way of life as reasons why they want their children to stay in the country. The commercial farmer today is economically interdependent with the industrial city -- the inevitable result of modern technology. His way of living, so far as physical conveniences and social and cultural life are concerned, is not obviously different from that of a city man. But he has made only minor modifications in the beliefs that have made up the agrarian tradition.

12. To provide for orderly development and growth.

Explosive rural development can do serious and inevitable damage to large parts of the American countryside. Unplanned and uncontrolled growth will produce the same environmental blight and monotonous sprawl in the urbanizing countryside during the next thirty years that has scarred the landscape of the nation's larger urban regions during the past three decades. Local government officials and citizen leaders in rural America at least have a fighting chance to preserve their communities by promoting sound development and orderly growth.

13. To protect the hydrologic integrity of watersheds through the control of storm water runoff and sediment damage, protection of aquifer recharge areas, and provision of buffers for water supply and other natural areas.

The hydrologic integrity (i.e., stream flow and runoff patterns) of any watershed is influenced by the nature of its land use. The rate of runoff is greater for urban land areas than that for a forested or agricultural area. This greater rate can cause higher flood stages, thus, increasing property damage from flood waters. Urban development also generates sediment and other pollutants which degrade the quality of our water resources and/or reduce the productivity and value of natural areas such as wetlands, unique wildlife habitat, and archaeological sites.

Agricultural land, including farm wood lots, interspersed with urban land use provides a more natural runoff and stream flow pattern than blanket urban land use. Also, agricultural lands surrounding water supply and other natural areas can provide a buffer for filtering sediment and other pollutants. Furthermore, agricultural lands allow greater infiltration of runoff which recharges groundwater aquifers.